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The Shadow of Content

A Drama in Three Acts.

by

H. W. GUENTHER

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Dedicated respectfully to

Miss Beatrice Dauphin

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No. 1.

THE SHADOW OF CONTENT

Dramatis Personae

Hans, a shepherd boy in the Alps mountains.

The Fairy.

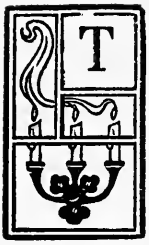
Hans' aged father.

Act I—On the mountain.

Act II—On the mountain.

Act III—In the cave.

Explanation



HE SHADOW OF CONTENT is an allegory in which Hans represents mankind and the Fairy that influence which ever tries to guide its destiny.

The Alpine rose is the key which opens the cave of human desires. The search for the flower points out the struggle of the human race for something better in life. The cave shows the splendor of man's dreams. It also portrays the vanity of earthly riches. The father is presented to remind mankind what it owes to the past.

The Shadow of Content

ACT I

Scene I—A beautiful range of mountains in the rear. Singing is heard, so that the echo grows louder, then fades away. It is early morning. George is a youth, herding his father's sheep. After singing for some time, he seats himself on a rock, and falls into deep meditation. A fairy god-mother, representing Fortune, touches him on the shoulder.

FAIRY

Ah, little George, 'tis true, 'tis true
That to some boys the world seems blue.
Far o'er the hills your heart is set
Far, far away you long and yet

GEORGE

Yes, I am very tired of this,
The world seems dull, I feel amiss
That far away in some fair clime
Is found a grand old world sublime.
I long for it. 'Tis there we find
The fairest treasures of every kind.

FAIRY

Of every kind. Your boyhood heart
Is yearning for that treasured mart.
Dear George 'tis yours.

GEORGE

'Tis mine indeed,
The fleecy clouds that o'er me speed
Sail on; they're free; they're not confined.
Their course is not at all outlined,
But boundless as the rolling sea
They wander on; their lot is free.

FAIRY

And free you are, my little boy;
The whole world sings with you in joy.
Look how it laughs when you are glad;
See how chagrined to find you sad.
George, 'tis within you fate decrees,
If you are bound, or like the breeze
You flit on high in realms your own
Where pangs of force are quite unknown.

GEORGE

And still I cannot pine to leave.
Some force is ever there to cleave
And whisper, "Little boy, please stay,
Don't set out on the rocky way
Of life. Your father, aged with care
Would have another load to bear.
Your mother's sleeping on the hill,

(*A dove coos*)

Her mem'ry lives; 'tis with me still:
These thoughts stand out—stand out so clear
That they like living ghosts appear;
And oft when evening shadows gleam
And all at once as in a dream
I see those gravestones twinkle far;
Yes, twinkle like the evening star,
It drives away all love to go.

FAIRY

Some inward voice then whispers no?

GEORGE

It whispers no, but with it all,
I hear the clearer, clarion call.

FAIRY

The call that summons you away,
That would reveal another day.
George, you are young; youth yearns to roam;
The child cares little then for home.
Day after day, this lonely plain
Caused you to while your hours in vain;
Slow hours they were from sun to sun.

GEORGE

I'm happy when each day is done;
I'm happy for I feel at rest.
When brightly glows the golden west.

FAIRY

The golden west where God has sown
The golden grains, and they have grown
So far, so broad, have grown so high
That they form pillars to the sky.

GEORGE

The lovely sky, where earth below
Is greeted by the heavenly glow;
Oft have I fancied I was there.

FAIRY

O lucky boy, how fair, how fair.

The fairy disappears and George looks at the mountain tops in deep meditation. During this meditation he utters a soliloquy.

GEORGE

Beyond that peak, on the other side, lies the valley of content. Could I but bring myself to a determination to say good-bye to father, upon whom the years have left a back bent with age, and a head wrapped in locks of silv'ry gray. How can I leave! How can I go! And mother—how well I remember when she kissed me farewell! That last day! Those last words! What has home been since? What is home without a mother? Ah, if I could but follow my

desire, and satisfy that ever-present impulse to see the world, I feel that happiness would be mine. Boy that I am, I realize fulwell that herding sheep is like the man who stands aghast and allows chance after chance to pass. Beyond, I know a smiling world is beckoning me on. Fate can but speak; can she suppress that burning hope that causes man to act? To reach beyond and grasp the jewels that lie at hand? Would that I could be contented here. But I can't.

FAIRY

I feel that I can read your mind.

GEORGE

I'm sure that on it you would find
All kinds of thoughts and hopes and fears,

FAIRY

Our fears build hopes throughout the years.

THE SHADOW OF CONTENT

GEORGE

And yet each year means less to me;
I seem to be less boy, less free.

FAIRY

George, I can feel within you creep
That joy, that wish which makes you leap
For gladness; you, who want to do
To build a mansion firm and true.
I'm with you, George, where plain meets hill,
Where heart is touched by love's mad thrill
Out where some spirit guides you on,
Guides gently on.

GEORGE

Until 'tis done,
Until a grander view is ours,

FAIRY

A pathway in a sea of flowers,
Flowers that have plucked the rainbow hue,
And washed themselves in cups of dew.
Ah, George, you see beyond this life,
Beyond this vale of earthly strife,
And yet within you, at your hand,
Lies all that lives in any land.
But you, my boy, list as I speak,
There're ever joys for those who seek.
Upon that lonely mountain side
In regions where you are the guide
You'll find a flower so grand and fair,
There's not a hue on earth so rare.
There's only one, but that one brings
The treasures, joys, and wealth of kings.
Look, seek, my boy, pass not this by,
Seek near, seek far, great treasures lie
At hand; set out this gem to find.

GEORGE

'Tis but a jewel of a kind?

FAIRY

'Tis but one kind. Within it dwells
The bubbling power of living wells.

GEORGE

And are these treasures all my own?

FAIRY

They're yours, all of them, yours alone.
Seek while the morning sun does shine;
Seek that the mountain rose be thine.

Curtain.

ACT II—SCENE I

Act II, Scene I, shows George still seeking for the rose. The fairy comes to him.

FAIRY

Still you are seeking high and low,
To find the treasured flower's glow.
Nearby it smiles, somewhere it blooms,
Scatt'ring aloft its sweet perfumes;
The love for pleasure lures you on.

GEORGE

I've searched from sun to sun.

FAIRY

You've searched, but like the world about,
Your searching has been done in doubt;
The world has little faith in things.

GEORGE

And still within it fair hope clings.

FAIRY

It clings, but like the shadows, fades.

GEORGE

And naught remains but merely shades?

FAIRY

No, no, my boy, 'tis more than dreams,
Night scatters with the morning's beams,
The morning's beams.

GEORGE

How grand are they
Once they have driven night away.

FAIRY

But were it not for baneful night
How could you love the morning light?

A chorus of beautiful voices is heard in the rear, coming seemingly over the hills. The fairy disappears.

GEORGE

Hark, hark, I hear a sweet refrain
The echoes of some moving strain

Like heavenly tones. Like tones above,
They seem enclosed with chords of love,
O maker of such wondrous tones,
Dost thou dwell here in earthly zones?
In earthly zones where art is poor,
Where you are but a madman's lure.

End of Scene I

George seats himself on another rock, while the chorus grows fainter and fainter until no sound is heard. Curtain.

ACT II, SCENE II

George is sleeping. The sun is setting. The fairy comes in and observes the sleeping boy.

FAIRY

How now, how peacefully he sleeps;
He slumbers while the treasure creeps
Untouched in nature's wild domain,
Bathing in sunshine and in rain.
Seek, seek, within you lies the power.
How can he seek at such an hour;

THE SHADOW OF CONTENT

Nay, nay, he's sought the live-long day.
He's but a boy—he loves to play.
Farewell, dear child, hope lingers nigh;
Hope leads to victory by and by.

The fairy holds out her hand toward the sleeping boy. This represents the world, which, having riches almost within its grasp, is still unable to realize the fact, and peacefully, unconcernedly, it slumbers on. After an extended pause, the curtain falls very slowly.

After a brief period the curtain rises again. A stiff breeze is blowing, which, with the waving shrubbery, makes the moonshine very effective. The blating of sheep helps to create the atmosphere. A shepherd's horn sounds from the distance. The after-effect of the echo is singular.

George is sleeping. After a few moments, he gets up, but soon goes back to sleep. He is restless, and talks in his sleep. He appears as one having a difficult problem on his mind.

GEORGE

How beautiful! How fair it gleams!
It's mine! It's mine! Can it be true?
Go on! Go on! Leave me alone!
Where rings that bell? O happy me!

Curtain falls, while George is agitated.

ACT II, SCENE III

Early morning. George awakes from his sleep and rubs his eyes.

GEORGE

How fair the morning dawns. I feel
Enraptured by its tingling peal.
Some spirit whispers to my soul
Today will bring me to my goal.
It seems I found the treasured prize
Lodged on a summit near the skies
Upon the mountain's top–most peak
It grew—it bloomed where none would seek.

Pause . . . . The fairy enters.

THE SHADOW OF CONTENT

FAIRY

Ah, little George, fine is the morn;
Fair gleams the day when fame was born.
Up in some rocky cavern nook,
Or close beside some babbling brook
Our little flower might smile away.

GEORGE

Grow where we used to run and play.

FAIRY

And dreams sometimes tell secrets too;
They tell if only people knew.

In a rocky nook George finds the beautiful mountain rose for which he has sought so long.

GEORGE

Ah, there it is, how fair it gleams.
No mortal ever dreamt such dreams.
Sweet flower, the days I've sought for thee
Shall ever live in memory.
Days that oft even lacked in hope;
Days when I tramped the mountain's slope.

THE SHADOW OF CONTENT

FAIRY

You've found the flower that brings you fame
In friends, in riches, and in name.
How tenderly it blooms; how rare
Its fragrance on the desert air.
Incessantly you've sought and sought
Well-earned the honor it has brought.

GEORGE

The search is merrier than the prize.
The child runs after butterflies.
It loves the chase—it craves the fun
It finds reward in what is done.

FAIRY

The goal is but a means to gain
Those things in life worth while; in main
We find that service is to live,
To sacrifice, to do, to give.

GEORGE

And you have been so good to me
Your watchful care meant victory.
Without the helpful words you gave
I'd still be but a drudging slave.

Very impressively George plucks the treasured prize. As he does so, a halo of light flashes, indicating that some potent force is in action. Curtain.

End of Act II

ACT III

This act opens with a magnificent scene, showing all kinds of riches in the way of silver, gold, diamonds, and everything that man could wish for. The flower has accomplished this, because it represents the Dame of Fortune. The little fairy, as the moving force of the emotions, represents the flower as the symbol of man's longings. George is the human world clamoring for the joys of life, but through these longings it forgets the essentials which made the present status possible. The cave is the ideal hope and desire of mankind.

FAIRY

There, George, you have your heart's desire
You're master of a great empire.
It's yours; you sought; you found the key,
Pick what you want; take what you see.
The birds are singing as you go;
The flowers are happy, for they know
That boundless wealth lies just ahead.
Pick not those lures which time might shed

But as you follow in the quest,
Be sure you don't forget the best.
That little flower is e'er your friend.
While it is yours, it will defend.
It will protect you near and far,
It leads you as a guiding star,
A star which twinkles far away.

GEORGE

I scarcely know just what to say.

FAIRY

Ah, how it glitters, how it shines,
That gold is from the choicest mines.

George proceeds to fill his pockets. He has passed a large pile of copper and silver, because the gold was very, very bright. George picks up the treasured rose and continues his journey through the cave of human desire. They wander along slowly until they come to an enormous supply of diamonds.

THE SHADOW OF CONTENT

FAIRY

Ah, don't forget those grand old times,
When you sang dear old shepherd rhymes;
When father's love was ever near
The old home ties you held so dear.

A choir of harmonious voices sings softly and lowly. The scene is very touching because George sees again in his reflections the little thatched cottage with its meager equipment; the struggling parent, for whom the few remaining days are numbered; the mother of whom he thought so often, now sleeping on a deserted hillside with but a tiny gravestone to mark her place. Even in the midst of a profusion of wealth, George feels unhappy and he longs for the little shepherd abode, lowly though it be. The fairy tries to encourage him.

FAIRY

George, look, admire, put to the test;
Choose, choose, but don't forget the best
Whate'er your heart's desire may be.

THE SHADOW OF CONTENT

In his meditation George has forgotten his flower. The fairy has no right to tell him further than to suggest the fact to him. His impulsive enthusiasm, together with his reluctant longing for home, has stood out over his mind. Whether the forces of the good fairy have been counteracted by the delvings of an evil brother, is not developed, but the fact is George forgets the best. The good fairy does her utmost to call him back.

FAIRY

Man's eyes are often blind to see
And know those things which lie at hand,
He longs to greet some foreign land;
And oft the prize for which he fights
Is lost in dizzy mountain heights.

ACT III, SCENE II

The glittering diamonds have taken George's mind off of everything except the thought that now he is immensely wealthy. He seems to have an attitude of indifference towards the kind fairy. He is no longer the same shepherd boy we saw on the rugged hillside.

GEORGE

Throughout this common stuff called gold,
Still greater wealth lies in your fold—
Lies at your door. These diamonds rare
Are sparkling treasures everywhere.

FAIRY

They sparkle everywhere, but lest
You pass along and leave the best:
Look well once more, look well again
'Tis pitiful to work in vain.

GEORGE

To work in vain when riches lie
Within the compass of your eye.

George proceeds to empty his pockets of the gold and exchange precious diamonds therefor.

GEORGE

Is this thing real? Am I awake?

FAIRY

It's yours, dear George, it's yours to take.

GEORGE

It's mine! It's all my own I know
From every crevice fountains flow.
Look how they sparkle in the light!

FAIRY

They're precious in the stormy night.

GEORGE

Ah, wealth beyond the power of kings;
It's wealth that comes from mortal things;
They're riches that I longed for much,
They come as if by Midas' touch;
The scornful world lies far behind;
It's lost its power to seek and find.

George is stuffing diamonds everywhere, and he has about completed matters. He is ready to go home and enjoy his new privileges.

GEORGE

How now, I have my coffers filled.

FAIRY

Has every longing hope been stilled?

GEORGE

Been stilled, and now the home-fires call.
I must return to childhood's wall;
I go; I bid farewell to thee;
Wealth here lies endless as the sea.

Both George and the fairy pause a moment to survey matters. George is ready now to depart from the cave of human desire. The fairy smiles in such a tender fashion that George is deeply touched.

FAIRY

The parting of the ways has come.
You see again your cottage home;
Farewell, my boy, and in your zest
Be careful not to leave the best.

As George, laden with his sparkling diamonds, steps out of the cave, he realizes that he has forgotten the little flower. As he does so, the fairy disappears, and in place of the diamonds, he finds dust. He sits down in despair and plans the journey homeward.

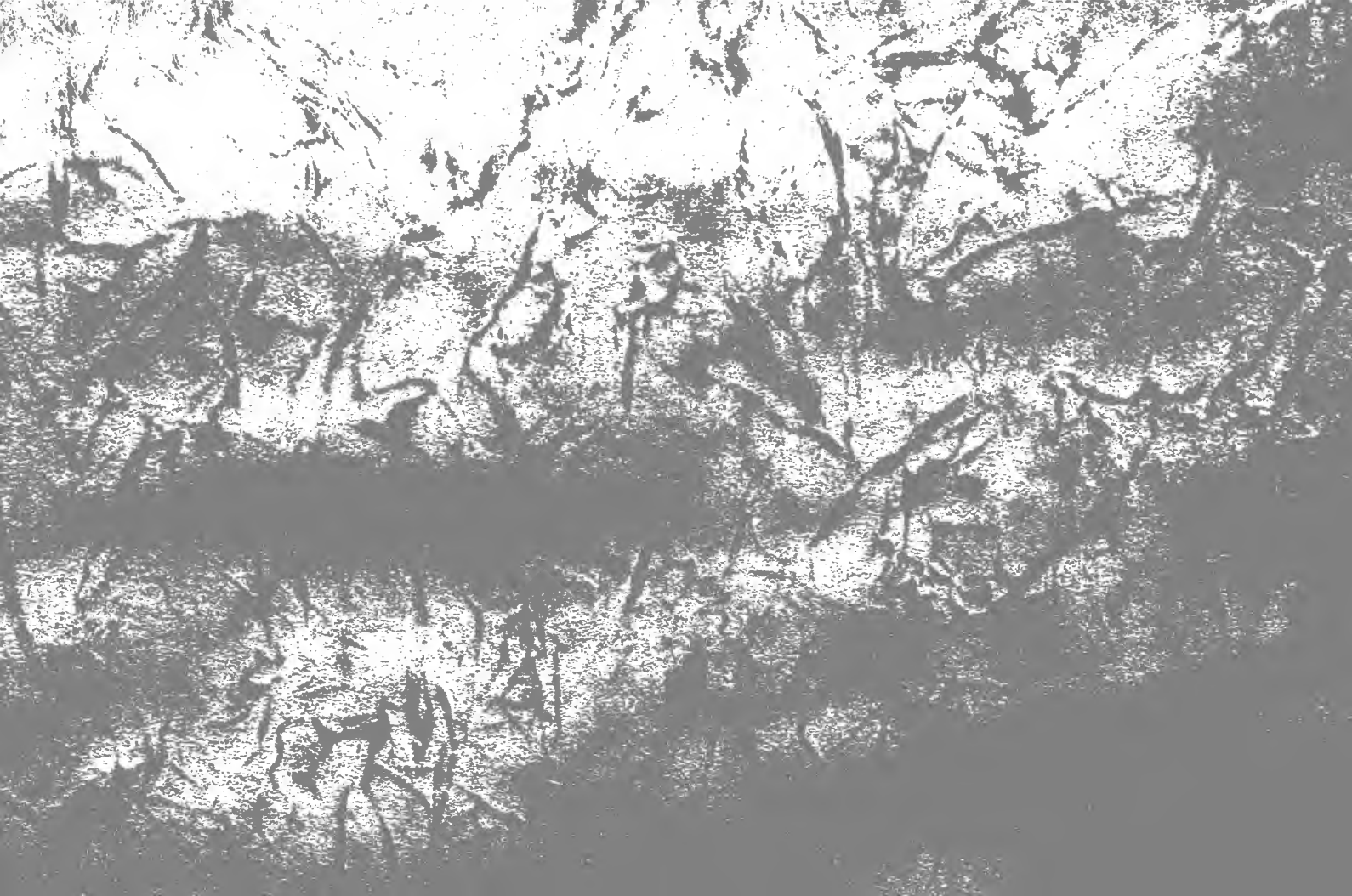
THE SHADOW OF CONTENT

ACT III, SCENE III

George at home. His father has died in the meantime, and he is a lonely soul in the world.

GEORGE

Fool that I've been, 'twas but a dream
I lived within that brilliant gleam;
Man cannot even hope to share
His building castles in the air.
The fates of human hopes decree
That man must always servant be.
And though his hopes be far or near
He rules but in an earthly sphere.
I'm like an infant in the night,
I'm searching for the light—the light.



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